



The Insider

www.senate.mi.gov/switalski

Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10

February 3, 2006

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and giving me an opportunity to represent you in the Michigan Senate. It is my sincere hope that this bi-weekly e-newsletter will keep you informed of the happenings in Lansing while staying true to the traditional style of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a library near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See schedule for details.

Mickey's Letter Bag: Graduation Requirements

Dear Senator Switalski,

I am writing today in regards to the proposed high school graduation requirements. I cannot believe that educated persons are considering this proposal. As an educator for the past 37 years I know that not all students are college prep students and that making all students take algebra, chemistry, physics, and two years of a foreign language is completely ridiculous. Many are unable to pass these courses, especially our special education and special needs students. I have taught math in the junior high and middle school and many students have an extremely difficult time even passing basic math computations. I have seen trends come and go in my many years of education, and this proposal is completely against having students succeed.

These requirements are short-sighted, impractical, and expensive. They will lead to higher costs and a higher dropout rate than we have now. We have never been a state to offer a "one size fits all" approach to public education and with this proposal you would be reducing or eliminating options and opportunities that students need. I ask you to further study this proposal as it is not in the best interest to all students in Michigan.

Sincerely,
Gertrude E. Hemmen
Sterling Heights

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Dear Senator:

I think the new standards are good; however, I would advocate for more foreign language training (and I think it really needs to begin in kindergarten and on a regular basis, e.g. every day, not once a week for 1/2 hour, as at my child's school). I also think that with the demise of the defined-benefit pension, our children should be required to take a course in basic personal finances.

Thanks,
Sylvia Minchington
Sterling Heights

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To Whom It May Concern-

I am very worried about what is going to be voted on in March in regards to Career and Technical Education. I teach Early Childhood Education at Dakota High School in Macomb. We have a wonderful hands-on class for our high school students. They are offered the opportunity to teach preschool age children four days per week. Many of my students want to become teachers in the future and this is where they get the opportunity to see if it is what they really want to do with their lives.

I believe four years of math and English, three years of science and social studies, and two years of a foreign language will directly impact the opportunity to take a two-hour block elective class such as early childhood education. There are so many great things going on in CTE. Please don't let our students miss out on so many great classes such as: Medical Careers, Culinary Arts, Small Engines, Construction Trades, etc. Thanks for your time.

A concerned teacher,
Sheila Corbin

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Dear Mickey,

Here are a few comments regarding the Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC) you outlined in the January Insider.

The MMC as presented appears to me to be a complete betrayal of any generation of our children that are subjected to its philosophy. The only benefit I see from this agenda is that Michigan High School Graduates will be able to ask "Do you want that supersized?" in a couple of different languages!!

How many careers can you name that require fluency in more than one foreign language? Unless they are going to make America a multilingual nation, there are only a select few careers that require dealing with foreigners who don't speak fluent English.

It is obvious to me that the proposed MMC was designed by someone or worse yet a committee, of those who are Liberal oriented, Liberal Arts Graduates who have never had to make a living in the world outside academia or politics. They are also dangerously out of touch with the real world economy. Less than 5% of our population are engineers or scientists yet they create 50% of America's GDP.

It is well known that America got where we are today by being the World Leaders in Technology. American Colleges have been replaced by Universities and 'Centers of Excellence' in other countries, notably India and China! Foreign graduate students applying to American graduate schools is dropping drastically (Chinese applications are down 45%, Indian applications are down 28%). Our data

management, information handling, computer hardware and software design, and other 'service' jobs have all been out-sourced to the Far East.

I'm afraid the next generation of Americans is proving to be technologically and mathematically illiterate, and will no longer be competitive with, or considered relevant to, the rest of the world. My observations also confirm that today's college graduates are only semi-literate in their own 'English language arts' and unable to coherently write or speak to their subject of supposed expertise.

I feel Americans need more emphasis on technology, math, and the sciences. I hope that, if the MMC is implemented, parents will have the option to take their children, and their money, to a school-of-choice that will adequately prepare students for the world and job market of the future.

Regards,
Bruce Appel
Shelby Township

###

Dear Mickey:

I think the proposed changes will probably improve the knowledge level of graduating students and help those who will be enrolling in a college; however, the proposed changes may also cause more drop-outs. This may/may not be a positive situation.

Regards,
Ed Debler
Sterling Heights

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Dear Senator,

I think the new requirements proposed are much too stringent. Not all students are pursuing fields where all the science and math courses would be required. This would prevent students who may not intend to go to college from even getting a High School diploma. I graduated from Denby in Detroit with a 3.219 grade point average. I took Algebra and the minimal sciences to be able to be eligible for college. As it turned out, I did not go due to the circumstances in my life at the time. I would hate to think that I would not have gotten my current job at Wayne State because I was never good at math or science, and therefore, couldn't receive a High School diploma. I took classes for my goal at the time to work in an office and pursue my writing. I think students who may be pursuing more artistic or perhaps journalistic careers should have an alternative curriculum choice. I have always felt that the United States is unrealistic in its belief that everyone should go to college.

We need to be more like the U.K. where you can go to a trade school if you want to be a skilled professional like an electrician, plumber or mechanic. This should be something that the counselors in schools could offer students. What would we do without these professionals in our lives? Your recent remodeling newsletter comes to mind. Well, I hope my opinion will be voiced and good luck in coming to a decision on this matter.

Sincerely,
Candy Detloff Smagghe
Roseville

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Dear Senator:

I had the distinct honor of accompanying Rick Repicky (our superintendent) to a breakfast with Governor Granholm in Clinton Township. The reason for this event was to call upon us to become mentors for children in need.

You see, I mentor 36 students this year, last year it was 42. It is not within a formal mentoring program; I am a CTE teacher. The students in my classes are those who are not the most studious - ones that need that good swift kick of motivation to keep them going until graduation. They are also the group of high school students who celebrate their A's like they won a million dollars, and the ones that continually thank you for keeping them focused in all of their classes so that they can graduate on time. Most return the years after graduation, just to let you know that they are keeping up with their college education, and that they won't let you down.

I am quite taken back at the fact that while the Governor and her husband call upon us as leaders of this state to mentor, they are also telling us that we don't have what it takes to determine courses for our students to take to graduate.

As president of our local board of education, we have had most of these graduation requirements in place for sometime. 4-English, 3-Math, 3-Science, 3-Social Studies, so the requirements themselves are not a problem. Having mandated courses is simply unrealistic. I could continue to spout facts to you as to why this won't work. I'm sure by now you have heard them all, so I won't. However, has anyone read the statistic from the Career Tech Education people about how the professional jobs have remained at a 20% level in Michigan since the 1950's and what has increased is skilled labor positions, which has risen from 20% (almost 80% of the jobs). Skilled labor jobs are those that are taught in a CTE class - with these mandates those classes are at risk of being cut, or having very few students able to enroll because of core class mandates.

I will just leave you with one comment: If we are the leaders of the children of tomorrow - then let us lead! If we are the citizens that they are calling upon to mentor students - then let us do our jobs in determining what classes our students need to fulfill graduation requirements. If you mandate what classes need to be taken - we won't have any students left to mentor within the schools, we will have a class of drop-outs who can't get a job anywhere.

Sincerely,
Deborah Prentiss, President
Fraser School Board of Education

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Dear Senator:

As a parent I **STRONGLY** urge you to vote to Keep Arts in the schools by maintaining an 18-hour Michigan Merit Core Curriculum. I have had so much joy in experiencing the many arts and music programs of the many talented students in the high school.

If you have never experienced the joy, I urge you to take advantage of a local school play or a music performance. Being a **VERY INVOLVED BAND BOOSTER** by donating my time or out of pocket expenses.....the joy I have received in return is ten-fold. Something I'll remember the rest of my life.

Can you imagine a City such as Detroit if there were **NO ARTS** and **NO CULTURE**? That is what you would be doing if you vote to lower the curriculum to 16 hours.

Please do NOT DISCOURAGE our future ART PROFESSIONALS. Let them have the same opportunities that their predecessors have had.

There are many benefits and FACTS supporting students who are involved in Arts programs. Every student in the nation should have an education in the arts.

Some of the benefits of the fine arts in schools have been success in society, school, developing intelligence, and success in life. The extra involvement and many hours of practice and appearances keep students from having too much idle time on their hands. Many colleges view participation in the arts and music as an experience that broadens students' understanding and appreciation of the world around them.

I hope to go on enjoying many years of the fine arts in the high schools. Even though my last child is graduating this year, I will be out in the future years to SUPPORT the ARTS. I took my son's Marching Band Jacket to be cleaned for the last time today, to be turned in next week, it brought tears to my eyes. Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and I hope it will help to influence your vote.

Ann Shalla

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Dear Senator Switalski,

As a concerned parent of Roseville School student I would like to address the High School Reform act. I don't think the public has been given the information that they deserve on this act. I think that it is something that could be a good thing if it is approach correctly. One of the concerns of mine and other parents with whom I have talked is the removal of electives for our students in the high school.

At this time in the student's life, they need to be exposed to as many different areas in life as they can within the school environment. There are many students whose families can't afford to send them to college and without the experience that they could get in high school will go no where. Roseville has a wonderful voc tech area that would not be used which would be a great shame. Students that are involved in band will only get band and nothing else; it would be a shame for those students who have been very involved in band all through elementary and middle school to drop out of band in high school.

My other concern is for the students that will fail when pushed into the extreme academics. I'm all for making sure that my children have wonderful academic exposure and I think that classes change with the times. However, I have a daughter who if pushed into harder classes or something that wasn't her interest would do poorly; my other daughter on the other hand would excel either way.

What about drop out rates? It would seem that if students are made to take classes that don't interest them or that they can't finish with a passing grade that they will just leave school. What does that do to home values when people look at school drop out rates before moving into our community? Roseville works hard to keep their schools up with technology and a great learning environment.

Along the same lines as failing grades in classes, how would those students make up that class? Will Roseville have summer school which is additional cost for the district. What will this do for the teachers who are currently employed? Will we have to hire additional teachers? Where will the money come for that? I know that all school districts are hurting for money and I don't think that higher class sizes should be an option. Most classes already have more students in them than a teacher alone should have to handle, I think students suffer when the class sizes are bigger because there is less time to assist students that need extra help.

In conclusion, I would hope that you take into consideration the concerns I have listed. I don't think it is a totally negative thing but I think students should be given some options in high school, it builds character and makes them think which is important in the real world. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Naomi Drouillard
Roseville

Mickey's Blog: Flexibility is Key in the New Curriculum

As you can see from the many letters I got on the proposed High School Curriculum, people have very different opinions about what the state should require. I think there is a general consensus that we need to raise standards for students, both in what we expect and what they should aim for themselves. The more people we get into post-high school training, the more competitive we will be as a state.

But that shouldn't mean college for everyone. There has always been an understanding among educators and the Legislature that the vocational technical path is a rigorous and legitimate pursuit that is appropriate for many students. If you consider the detailed understanding of math and geometry required for a plumber or carpenter, then you can appreciate the value of those careers. If you don't understand that, then wait 'til your toilet plugs up or your sewer line collapses, and see how important the trades are to you. And in terms of intellectual rigor, I would guess many of today's college bound students would be hard pressed to do the math necessary to earn their journeyman's card.

I think we need to keep the vocational technical students in mind when we design these standards. We need to be flexible enough to say that business, trade, and technical classes that contain significant math components should count toward fulfilling math requirements. We should recognize that journalism classes could substitute for Language Arts requirements, and that there is a role for art and music and electives in the curriculum.

Since this topic has drawn such interest, I'll talk about it again next issue, concentrating on the 2 year foreign language requirement proposed by the Board of Education and dropped in the House Plan, and the requirement to take at least one on-line component during your high school career. Thanks to all of you who have shared your thoughts, you are helping me to see all aspects of this issue.

Would you like to respond to something that a fellow interested member of the public wrote? How about anything that I have said? Feel free to e-mail me and I will publish a selection of your responses in the next edition.

Mickey's TV Insider Show

Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

Sterling Heights

Every Saturday and Sunday at 12:30 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Utica

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Clinton Township

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Roseville

Various Times
(Comcast Channel 18)

*Please note that Sterling Heights/Utica/Clinton Township will show the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 5 and Wide Open West Channel 10. Clinton Township will air the TV Insider Show at various times during the last week of every month. Roseville can see the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 18.

Coffee Hours

*Please note that since the District Office is in Roseville, I do not have set coffee hours in Roseville. However, I encourage you to visit the Roseville office. We even have a coffee pot. Everyone is welcome to attend the coffee hours and discuss their issues and concerns.

February 6 7-9 p.m. Location: Sterling Heights Public Library (40255 Dodge Park Road) Sterling Heights	February 27 7-9 p.m. Location: Clinton-Macomb Public Library (35891 Gratiot) Clinton Township
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